

COVID-19

Flexible seating for the return to the office

A step by step guide to using flexible seating when re-opening your office in the wake of COVID-19



Introduction

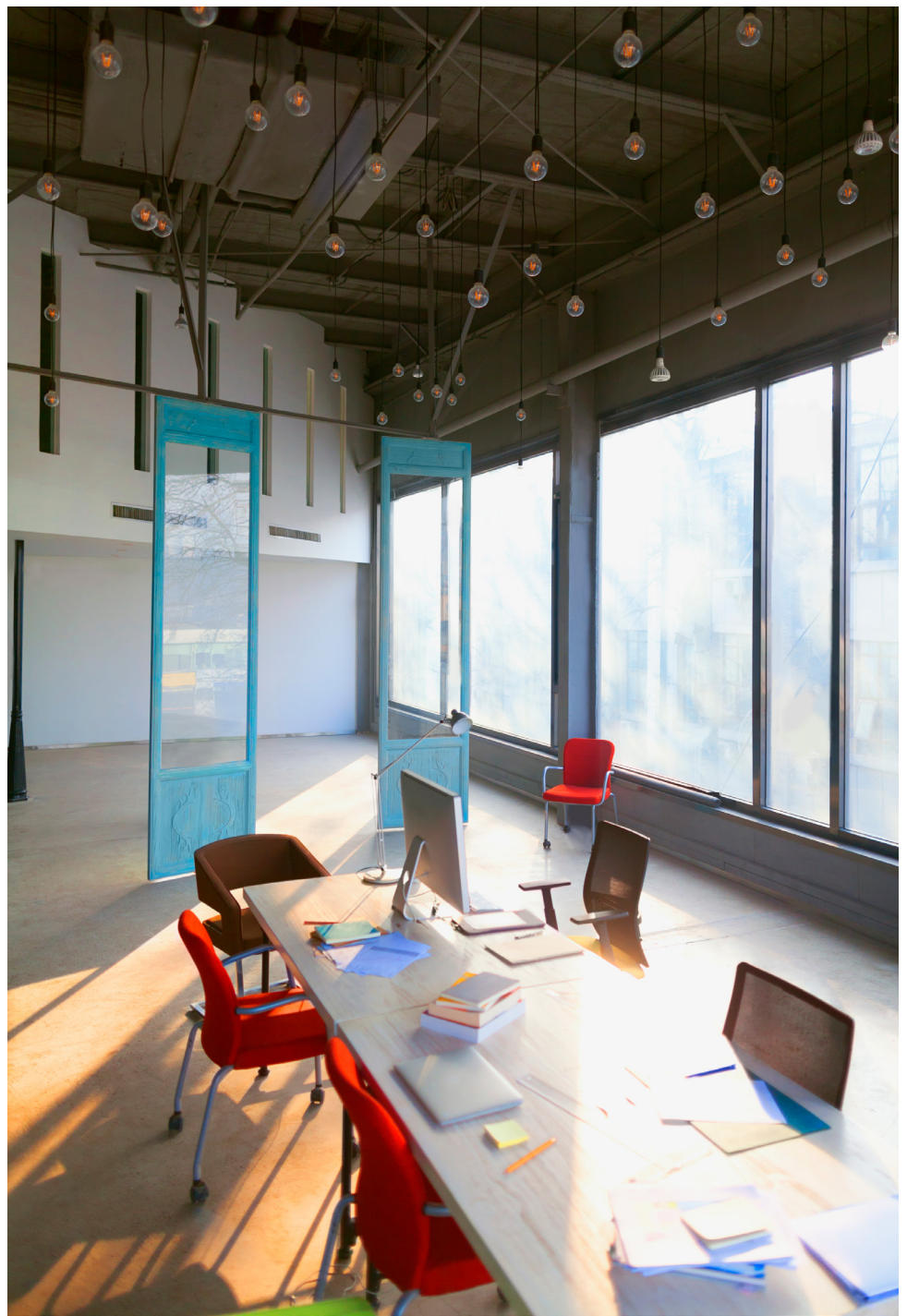
Returning to work will be a gradual process. How can you create the flexibility needed to safely bring a percentage of employees back into the office? And how can you ensure these desks will be safe distances apart and are cleaned in between uses?

This guide is designed to help you through the process of setting up flexible seating to ensure a safe return to the office for your employees.

Why choose a flexible seating strategy?

If there is one thing we know about COVID-19 in relation to the workplace, it's that things are changing frequently. Who may or may not come into the office based on their personal situations is likely to change frequently, so maintaining assigned seating floor plans is going to be a challenging proposition.

Let's take a look at the steps you'll need to take to bring flexibility to your floor plan, seating, and employees.



Step one

Know which desks can and can't be used to accommodate physical distancing

Current [physical distancing guidelines for employers](#) recommend employees stay at least six feet (2 meters) apart at all times.

If you don't have enough space in your facility to physically separate every desk six feet apart, you can maintain distance between seated employees by limiting which desks can be booked on your floor plan.



[Distancing Planner](#) from OfficeSpace is a simple and easy way to instantly identify which desks you can keep active based on what safe distance you choose. The minimum distance may be six feet, but many of our clients are opting to slightly increase this distance to err on the side of caution. This can allow room for people to get to their desks. Other considerations need to be given to pathways and potential choke points like entries and exits on a particular floor.

Step two

Set up your flexible seating

Once you know your new active capacity, you can turn selected desks into bookable desks. With [Distancing Planner](#), it's as simple as one click.

The key question at this step is a strategic one: Am I allowing anyone to book these desks? Or will there be restrictions on who can book them?

This decision depends on your company culture and structure, and will likely need to be answered with support from other stakeholders, such as HR.

There are only two options:

No restrictions:

Desks are bookable by anyone.

Restrictions:

Desks are being assigned to shifts, teams, or departments and are only available to certain employees on certain days.



Considerations

Eliminate “on the spot” bookings

Before the outbreak, employees wandering around the office and using any available desk (hot-desking or free addressing) wouldn't be a major concern. But now that studies have shown that the COVID-19 virus can survive on surfaces for 4 to 72 hours, it's clear that multiple employees sharing the same desk—and therefore the same surface—is far from ideal. OfficeSpace's [Desk Booking](#) feature can ensure this doesn't happen.

Provide touchless booking & check-in

The new office environment will be very different from the pre-COVID one. Before, touch screens were trending as were devices to add to desk or rooms to check in. But today, we are living in a world where touching shared surfaces is far from ideal. Make sure your desk booking system allows employees to book a desk in advance and check in using their personal mobile device.

Considerations

Desk hoteling, not desk sharing

With desk hoteling, employees need to make an advanced reservation to use a desk. Employees can submit booking requests on their own devices, and a designated person on your team can view, approve, or decline each request.

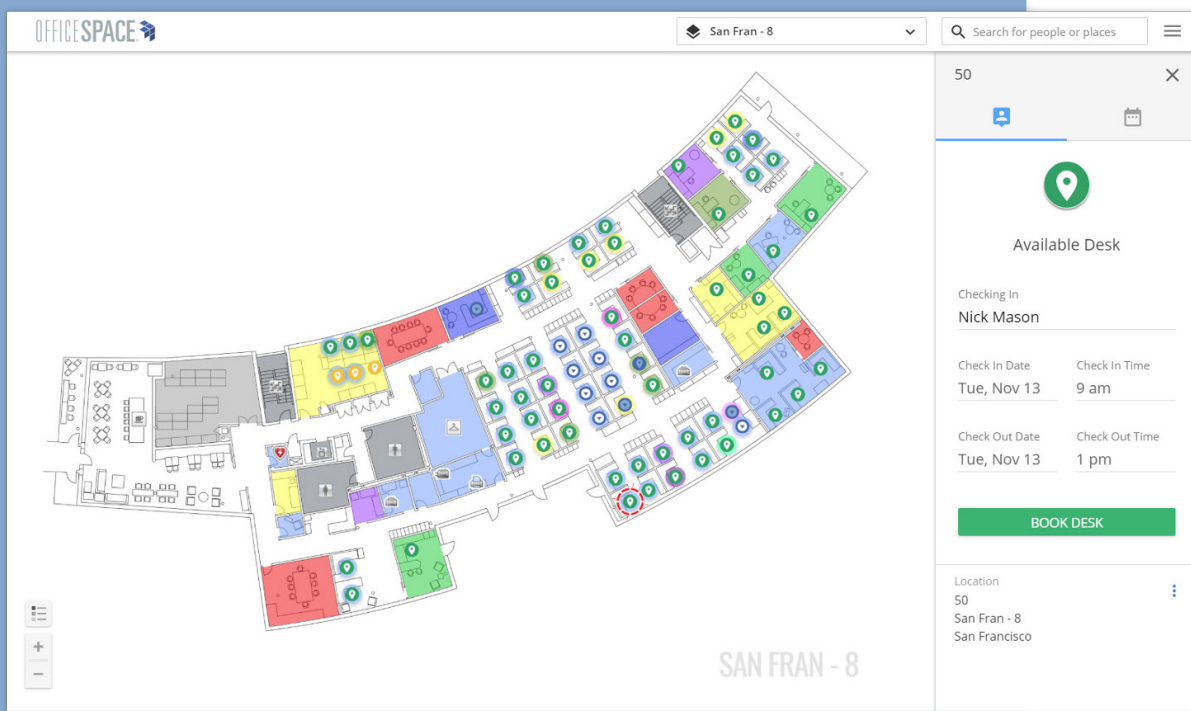
This process is a little more involved than hot desking. But it gives facilities teams more control and visibility into how and when desks are being used throughout the workplace.

Control which desks an individual employee can book

It might have been ideal for the same employee to work at the same workstation without sharing the space. But many companies with large workforces and shared desk programs won't have that luxury, especially if like many they're also implementing shifts.

Control *when* and *where* individual employees can book desks during their time at the workplace. If an infected person has been present in the workplace, their whereabouts will be easier to trace and the cleaning of those areas (desks, floors, common areas) will be much more manageable.

The added benefit of this strategy is that you can also block out "non-bookable" hours to give your cleaning crew ample time to disinfect desks between bookings.



Step three

Communicate your changes

This might seem like an obvious step, but it can easily be a more challenging one. Ideally, you will want to rely on the forms of communication that have been successful in the past. If employees usually get important announcements through email from their direct manager, stick with that. But do not rely on email alone. OfficeSpace clients are using a variety of communications including Slack, PDF manuals, Zoom meetings, and videos.



The best form of communication for your floor plan changes will be an online digital floor plan. OfficeSpace's Visual Directory® gives employees the opportunity to see what changes have been made before they leave the comfort and safety of their own homes.

Visual Directory® allows employees to:

- Find safe and available desks
- See what COVID-19 safe measures have been implemented
- Check into desks upon arrival from their personal mobile device
- See areas of the facility that are closed ahead of their arrival

Other resources

Remember: your country may have additional COVID-19 workplace guidelines

At the time of writing this guide, the “six-foot workplace distancing” advisory was in effect around the world.

Be sure to check the latest coronavirus advisories from your government and local health authorities as you plan your organization’s approach to social distancing in the workplace.

Depending on your region, additional advisories and updated guidelines may be in place.

For reference, here are some quick links to each country’s COVID-19 Workplace Guidelines.

USA: [Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)

Canada: [Preventing COVID-19 in the workplace](#)

UK: [Guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Australia: [COVID-19 Information for workplaces](#)

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